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SUBJECT: GAM FOUNDER HASAN DI TIRO RETURNS TO ACEH

11. (SBU) Summary: Free Aceh Movement (GAM) founder and leader Hasan di Tiro returned to Aceh on October 11 in an historic visit to the province some 30 years after he went into exile. The 83-year old di Tiro has used the visit to call on all sides to respect the 2005 Helsinki MoU, but because of his frail condition, has been forced to deliver his public statements through surrogates. Indonesian police and military have reacted professionally to di Tiro's presence. Since the signing of the Helsinki MoU, di Tiro has said he would visit Aceh "when the time was right". Health and other factors prevented the visit and many doubted he would ever return. So far, observers agree, the visit has promoted the peace process and helped to bolster the ranks of the Aceh Party prior to April, 2009 legislative elections. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Hasan di Tiro founded the Free Aceh separatist movement in 1976 and fled to Malaysia in 1977 after being wounded in an Indonesian government attack on GAM forces. He eventually settled in Sweden in 1980, becoming a Swedish citizen and receiving political asylum. His visit to Aceh on October 11 represents the first time he has been able to return to Aceh since fleeing the province. As the founder and ideological fountainhead of the Aceh independence movement, he is revered by GAM and its successor organization the KPA. While not a direct signatory of the Helsinki MoU in 2005 (his right-hand man and GAM commander Malik Mahmud signed on behalf of the GAM movement), he is still regarded as the pre-eminent father of the GAM movement and his return to Aceh after over 30 years represents a significant event for Acehnese regardless of their political persuasion. di Tiro is also the grandson of Aceh hero Tengku Cik di Tiro, who was killed fighting the Dutch in 1891.

Some in Government Caught Off-Guard

13. (SBU) Sources at the Coordinating Ministry of Politics Law and Human Rights have told Consulate Medan that they were not consulted by the Department of Foreign Affairs before the issuing of an Indonesian visa to Hasan di Tiro, who now holds Swedish citizenship. Initial police reaction in Aceh was muted; Police Commissioner Rismawan told the media in advance of di Tiro's visit that he would not be accorded any special status. Later, comments from the Indonesian military made it clear that they considered the di Tiro visit of special interest, and the police agreed to provide additional security. KPA stepped into this void by stating publicly that they would provide a security detail of 360 loyal GAM supporters, albeit under overall police control.

14. (U) The newly assigned Chief of the Indonesian National Police, General Bambang Hendarso Danuri, told the media on October 9 that the police had prepared security measures for "a regular guest" in advance of di Tiro's visit. When asked whether Hasan di Tiro's visit could reignite separatism in Aceh, Hendarso refused to comment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed to the media on October 7 that the visit was personal in nature and that there was no "political agenda". An Aceh Regional Police spokesman told the press on October 7 that they were not sure yet about specific locations to place police officers for the security because the KPA had not yet provided the complete agenda of di Tiro's visit in Aceh. KPA has told the media that they have organized a special unit to support the police in protecting di Tiro. Governor Irwandi Yusuf declared in advance of the visit that di Tiro would be treated as a provincial "guest of state".

Soujourn in Malaysia: Preparations for Return

15. (U) Hasan di Tiro arrived in Kuala Lumpur from Sweden on October 4 and spent a week in Malaysia prior to departing for Banda Aceh on October 11. Accompanying di Tiro was former GAM "Prime Minister" Malik Mahmud (who signed the Helsinki peace agreement on behalf of GAM) and former GAM "Foreign Minister" Zaini Abdullah. Indonesia's chief negotiator at Helsinki, Hamid Awaluddin (currently Indonesian Ambassador to Russia) and Zainal Arifin, Deputy of the Forum for Communication and Coordination (FKK) from the Coordinating Ministry of Politics Law and Human Rights also joined di Tiro in Kuala Lumpur. During that time media reports indicated that he also met with Governor Irwandi Yusuf, other GAM supporters both from Indonesia and Malaysia, and Acehese religious leaders. Di Tiro also

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gave TV interviews to journalists from Indonesian TV station RCTI and Malaysian TV7 in English on October 8 emphasizing his support for peace in Aceh and stressing the personal nature of his motivations for returning to Aceh at this time.

Political Significance

16. (SBU) Regardless of how GAM or the Indonesian government attempt to paint the motives for his visit, di Tiro's trip carries considerable political significance. Di Tiro's visit is widely seen as a way for the post-GAM Aceh Party to bolster its ranks in advance of April, 2009 legislative elections after which the Aceh Party is expected to become the largest caucus in the Aceh provincial legislature (DPRA). While di Tiro has stressed the personal nature of the visit, the symbolism and choice of venues and appearances have showcased the link between di Tiro's founding of the GAM movement and the current Aceh Party's campaign to win seats in the upcoming April elections. The head of rival Aceh local political party SIRA, Taufik Abda, told Consulate Medan on October 14 that di Tiro's presence in Aceh has had a unifying effect on Party Aceh's membership as well as assuaging skeptics of di Tiro's acceptance of the Helsinki MoU.

17. (SBU) But the visit also showcases the mutual efforts of actors in Banda Aceh and Jakarta to ensure that di Tiro's statements advance the peace process. One of the reasons that several important Aceh interlocutors traveled to Kuala Lumpur during the week of October 4 may have been to coordinate with di Tiro and ensure his message and visit were not divisive. The military and police have shown restraint during the visit, and GAM has not used the event to reopen old wounds. As such, and provided this goodwill continues, di Tiro's return puts a seal of success on the achievements of the past three years.

GAM Supporters descend on Banda Aceh

18. (SBU) di Tiro was welcomed by dignitaries and supporters at Banda Aceh's airport on arrival on October 11. He went directly to the provincial capital's Raya Mosque from the airport, and addressed his supporters through a surrogate, Malik Mahmoud, at an event attended by thousands of GAM followers. di Tiro's next stop was the

Governor's office where he met with governor Irwandi Yusuf and 130 dignitaries and officials during a dinner event on the evening of October 11. Dignitaries included Vice Governor Nazar, the head of the provincial legislature, the Head of the FKK, the heads of the Aceh Reintegration Body, and senior KPA officials. A local NGO reported to Consulate Medan that they had been contacted by KPA to send foreigners to support the rally as well as provide money so that GAM supporters from West Sumatra and other regions could attend. Consulate Medan contacts indicate that GAM did not make provisions for food, water, or accommodation for their supporters at the Saturday rally and that this detracted somewhat from the success of the event.

Link to Aceh's Historical Heroes

19. (SBU) On Sunday, October 12 di Tiro visited the graves of Acehese resistance fighters involved in battling the Dutch before traveling east from Banda Aceh to visit the grave of his great-grandfather Cik di Tiro, another hero of resistance against the Dutch. At the grave of Cik di Tiro, Hasan di Tiro issued a second statement through Malik Mahmoud invoking the history of Acehese resistance against foreign occupation but stressed that the Acehese values of the warrior reflect a warrior "who is dauntless in war, but even more courageous in peace". The link to Cik di Tiro, through his grandmother, is a tool that Hasan di Tiro has called on in recent years to link him to the Acehese royal family and cement his claim to the Wali Nanggroe (Defender of the Nation) position stipulated in the Helsinki MoU.

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